

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

(*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 9:30 A.M.*)

(The following was transcribed by Kim Castiglione, Legislative Secretary)

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay. Good morning. If everyone could please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Legislator Calarco.

(*Salutation*)

And please stand for a moment of silence for those who defend our country.

(*Moment of Silence*)

Thank you. Okay. We have a couple of cards. We do have a presentation this morning. We have -- we have only two cards, so we'll start with the public portion. The first one is Andrea Lang.

MS. LANG:

Good morning. My name is Andrea Lang. I'm the face of the Suffolk County 911 Dispatcher Emergency Operator. Our communication center is the heart of the Suffolk County Police Department. I'm here today to bring attention to the fact that we are severely understaffed. I myself was mandated to work an 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. shift on a regularly scheduled day off before I left for the night after a four p.m. to a midnight shift. That was the day Hurricane Sandy came to town. I left my family and drove into work during the height of the storm. I took over the precinct radio from the obviously stressed and exhausted prior Dispatcher and proceeded to weed through over 300 calls in the northwest area of the Suffolk County Second Precinct. My mantra for the evening was "life over property". I made experienced decisions over what calls would go out first to the 30 officers I had on patrol that evening. Hurricane Sandy is an extreme example of what I do, what I signed on to do.

I'm proud to serve the residents of Suffolk County in their greatest time of need. I tend not to think about what I do, as the details would overwhelm most people. I look forward to my days off and make that time count with my family and friends. Doing what I do for a living, and knowing that my job can cause me physical, harmful conditions related to stress and shift work, makes it harder to understand the County's blind eye toward realizing we at this time cannot do more with less. I no longer plan on going home after work. I plan on staying for 12-hour days and doing double duty at my job. My primary function is no longer Dispatcher, as I have to fill in for 911 Operators that we do not have.

We are aware of the County's current fiscal problems. We have made sacrifices to fill positions currently empty by staying overtime to fill them. The very nature of our job doesn't give us a choice. We are not looking for accolades or employee of the month; we need help. The current rates of physical illness in our department has risen visibly. We no doubt -- I'm sorry. We too often hear about diagnosis of high blood pressure, cancer, heart issues, and have no doubt that the correlation between our current working conditions and these medical problems is more than coincidental. Imagine the effect one getting the flu and feeling guilty about taking sick time and coming to work because they know not showing up will cause forced overtime could have on a whole squad.

We are not asking only for ourselves, but for the deserving constituency of Suffolk County. They need to know their lives and property are of paramount importance to the County's governing establishment. At this point in time, the question is not what we can do without in the interest of financial constraints, but what we cannot afford not to do. Our neighbors are counting on us to be there for them as we are counting on you to be there for us. Thank you.

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Thank you. Any questions? Legislator Kennedy has a question for you, Andrea.

MS. LANG:

I'm sorry.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Thank you. I'm sorry. I was out of the room. I didn't get your name.

MS. LANG:

My name is Andrea Lang.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay. We have gotten a number of e-mails from a variety of different 911 Operators talking about a bunch of things that have gone on, particularly since Sandy. There were issues with accessing gas, and whether or not you were considered as priority personnel and things like that.

MS. LANG:

We were not.

LEG. KENNEDY:

No. I heard about that and, you know, in the postmortem that we do after the storm, the whole gas debacle is something that we have to work at as well.

My question today goes to either you or BRO, as to I'm a little confused. You're a 911 Operator or you're a Dispatcher?

MS. LANG:

I'm a Dispatcher, but I'm also trained to take 911 calls.

LEG. KENNEDY:

What is the difference between the two job titles?

MS. LANG:

A 911 Operator strictly takes 911 calls. A Dispatcher does double duty. We're on opposite sides of the same room. A 911 Operator takes the calls from the public, they send them over to us on the dispatch side, and we give to the Police Officers. We assist the Police Officers.

LEG. KENNEDY:

So do calls come up like in a cue that the operator takes and then you as a Dispatcher --

MS. LANG:

Yes.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Route them out?

MS. LANG:

Out to the Police Officers, yes.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Are you routing out only to Police Officers, or do you send to the fire departments, the ambulance or other emergencies, or is it just S.C.P.D.?

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

MS. LANG:

The 911 Operator, depending on the call -- the 911 Operator gets the call. Depending on what they need either connects them to the ambulance department or the fire department, and that call essentially is already started within those departments and then sent over to Dispatch to be given to the Police Officer. But we do notify for an ambulance or the fire department as well.

LEG. KENNEDY:

How many of you are there in Dispatch, approximately?

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Fifty-five.

MS. LANG:

Fifty-five.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

John, we're going to have a presentation.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Somebody's going to brief us on it?

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

We're going to have a presentation so you'll have time to ask those questions.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay. Well, so I'm pleased to hear from the Chairwoman that we're going to get some numbers, but it sounds like at this point that, regardless of whatever the numbers are of you folks there, there's not enough of you.

MS. LANG:

There's not enough. It's not enough.

LEG. KENNEDY:

All right. Thank you. Thank you for coming forward.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Thank you, Andrea.

MS. LANG:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Next one is Deborah McKee.

MS. MC KEE:

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Deborah McKee. I'm a 911 Emergency Dispatcher for the Suffolk County Police Department and a member of AME, the Police Emergency Unit.

In the Fall of 2007, I spoke before this body as a member of the Executive Board of AME regarding staffing shortages at 911. Today I speak to you as an Emergency Dispatcher directly from the 911 floor. While the conversation is much the same, let me make one thing perfectly clear. Our current Administration and our County Executive both have and are doing everything they can within their power to support us and give us the tools we need to do a job that we have consistently done in an exemplary manner.

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

This is a job that is like no other. We look at multiple screens that update on a moment to moment basis in order to perform our job and send essential services to where they are needed. As a Dispatcher I constantly scan five computer monitors that are divided into some 16 smaller segments, all while working a foot pedal to speak and typing on two separate keyboards. Oftentimes I work the phone at the same time during instances where another agency is involved, such as the MTA in cases where a stop order has to be placed on trains for suicidal individuals on the tracks.

A Dispatcher carries much responsibility and endures the inherent stress that comes with that responsibility on a daily basis. As you know, we work 24/7, a schedule that includes weekends and holidays and rolls forward through the calendar. It takes us two months of rotation to get a few weeks of weekends off, and three years to get one year of major holidays off. Unfortunately, prior administrations never truly appreciated the depth of services we provide, nor the level to which they encompass.

I started with this department in 1993. 2013 will be my twentieth year of service. Prior to my arrival, a former administration saddled us with X days in exchange for taking us off an unhealthy rotational three shift schedule that included midnights. These are six days a year that fall on our three day off acclamation swing that we work for free. A six day week. And it's not unheard of to have your X day fall on a major holiday. They told us then that we work less than the average County employee and had to pay back those days. That's not true. And in many years since, we've continually averaged more days per year than the average employee. Subsequent administrations have subjected us to doing more with less, which brings us before you today.

We are currently so short that each day that I go into work it is uppermost in my mind that I may be mandated to stay, hence performing a 12 hour shift, regardless of any other obligations in my life, family or otherwise. We all volunteer for overtime within our capabilities to try and mitigate the mandate burden, but it's not always possible.

I want to express my thanks to my department for all that they're trying to accomplish on our behalf under the present circumstances. For the health, safety and well-being of our unit, as well as the public, please address our issues and get us the manpower we need in order that we may continue to provide them and the Police Officers we dispatch to with the highest levels of service just as we always have.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Thank you, Deborah. And there's one question from Legislator Gregory.

LEG. GREGORY:

Thank you. Thank you for coming here today, Deb. I guess when I first got into office I -- myself, I think Legislator Browning, were you there, Kara?

LEG. HAHN:

(Nodded yes).

LEG. GREGORY:

You were there? Legislator Eddington. We went to the 911 Operators, we looked at the operation. We saw there was an issue with the software at the time. We saw the Dispatchers and it was a whole issue. The former County Executive and the PBA kind of battling back and forth on response times and stuff like that. So I'm somewhat familiar with the operations. And I knew there was a shortage back then and there has been for some time now.

I'm just a little more curious as to what the issues are. We started receiving these e-mails that first seemed to just -- well, we're not essential, so we can't get ahead in line to get gas so we can get to work. And then I don't know if it kind of morphed into something else. I got an e-mail on

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

Thanksgiving day, which was a little disturbing, but I'm just trying to clarify what are the issues as you see them. Is it just about gas, is it just about we want to be given due consideration that we're essential employees, that we do, you know, important work, which you absolutely do. The previous speaker did speak about vacancies. I'm aware of those. Is it about that, is it about being overworked, not, you know, not enough, you know, Dispatchers? Is it about being designated as essential? What's the issue? Or issues.

MS. MC KEE:

Andrea spoke very well to what the real issue is here, and it is staffing. Yesterday I went in at noon for overtime before my regular four-to-twelve. I got out at midnight last night. I'm here this morning. I'm going in at noon again today before my regular shift, and I will work four-to-twelve this evening. And I do it as often as I can because I know that if I don't, the next person in line may have -- they may not feel well enough to do 12 hours, so we're trying to help each other as much as we can. That stresses people out.

Was gas an issue during that brief period of time? For some people it may have been. For me it wasn't. I filled the tank before the storm and I prepared to sit in line if I needed to afterwards, and I didn't do any non-essential driving, because I got the depth and the scope of what was going on in our world for those days. Whether or not we're essential, we know we're essential. We need the County to recognize that these positions have to be filled because it's now becoming a health issue up there. If you were to check with supervision, you would find out that, you know, back in 2007 I spoke to you about heart attacks. We've had more since then. We've had people come down with cancer. Is it directly stress related? Ask a doctor. I'm not a doctor. We need staffing.

LEG. GREGORY:

Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Thank you. Kara.

LEG. HAHN:

Thank you for all that do you. I've seen it. You know, when you call 911, you know how important you are at the other end. Your calm, your collectiveness, your ability to handle the stress of the individual calling, all of that. Your time off and your ability to recoup is so critical to your ability on the phones as well. And it's very, very frustrating to hear what seems to me like an overall, in some ways almost lack of respect, and that is -- we got to change that. And I don't know, I wonder how many of you are women?

MS. MC KEE:

That's a good question. I've never actually done a head count. But I think that if you look into what it is we do, how we do it, and the scheduling that's in place, especially with regard to those X days, what you just said hits the nail on the head. We need those days off to recoup to go back in. I don't look to do overtime on my days off, because those are my recharge days, hence the 12-hour day yesterday and the 12-hour day today, and perhaps tomorrow as well. When I leave there, I need to get back to being me.

LEG. HAHN:

We know how important that is in all of the public safety fields that we have here at the County, and in so many in responding to individuals in crisis puts yourself in crisis as an individual in the ways that your body needs to react to, or automatically reacts to in ways that are detrimental to it. And so recognizing, of course, in a storm you're going to have to work a 20 -- you know that, you know that kind of thing. But it shouldn't be an ongoing pressure and stress on your life that you're always working this extra time and can't even expect free time for yourself. And so I think we do need to take this seriously and I think we're all here to hear the presentation.

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

I don't want to, you know, go on any more until -- and I'll ask questions when that's done. But thank you for all that you do. And I know how important it is to our residents that call and ask for the very professional services that our Police Department provide, that our firefighters provide, and you're that very first point of contact and how you respond and are able to get from an individual calling in the emergency situation the very critical pieces of information that the Police Officer will need, the firefighter will need. It's so important and it's critical to how we provide our first response. So thank you.

MS. MC KEE:

Thanks.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Kate, can I?

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Thank you, Deborah. Okay, John.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Can I follow-up on what Kara said? We really do need to have this presentation, but Legislator Hahn hit on a very important point I think and one that you brought up, about the percentage of your operators and Dispatchers that are women. And in particular, you know, just to kind of add to what Legislator Hahn talked about, being a spouse of a night nurse, there has been research, and certainly Dr. Spencer can confirm that, that there's a higher incidence of breast cancer with night workers, that employees, which is typical and you see in, you know, health care and other types of placements. So absolutely, positively I'm concerned.

You usually do not hear about mandated overtime unless you're talking about somebody like a nurse on a floor, like my daughter or wife are. But this is something where there's a human toll, and obviously we're going to need to hear about what's going on with the overtime, because, you know, there's that point where you look at the cost associated with filling a position and bringing on another person in straight salary is substantially less than the OT, and it's disingenuous not to hire because of this notion about benefits, and that's the line we always hear, *it's cheaper to run OT because you don't have another set of benefits*. But it's not a proper way to operate. I would be interested to hear about the numbers in both those categories of women employees. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay. Thank you, Deborah.

(The following was transcribed by Lucia Braaten, Court Stenographer)

So we will move on with the presentation. And so, Mike and Suzanne, if you would like to come forward. And I don't know if there's anyone else that you have that you need to bring up with you. So we have Mike Finland, Executive Vice President of AME, and Suzanne McBride, who is President of the Police Emergency Unit. Suzanne -- is it Suzanne or Susan?

MS. MC BRIDE:

Suzanne.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

I thought so. Okay. I knew -- so, if you would like to go ahead and begin whenever you're ready.

MR. FINLAND:

Okay. Good morning, everyone. I thank you for your time. My name is Michael Finland and I'm Executive Vice President from Suffolk County AME.

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

From a historical perspective, the genesis of the Suffolk County Police Department, as you all well know, occurred January 1st, 1960. Through the past 52 years, Suffolk County government has grown dramatically in tandem with the population expansion in our municipality.

County government has responded appropriately in addressing the needs of our residents as we have grown. Our points and purpose in speaking to this committee today is to hone in on a unique and specific issue which is occurring within the Police Emergency Unit of the Suffolk County Police Department. There currently exists a three-tiered fragmentation of that unit.

First of all, you would have the 911 Division, which is comprised of Emergency Complaint Operators, or ECOs. These individuals deal with a plethora of incoming calls on a 24/7 basis. Most frequently, they are dealing with life and death situations, which call for swift and decisive action on behalf of the ECO taking the call. The gamut of calls can run from the sublime, for an example, a cat stuck in a tree, to extremely serious situations, such as a multiple car accident, a bank robbery in progress, a heart attack victim, or a host of problematic issues related to a storm or hurricane occurrence.

The second component of police emergency encompasses the Public Safety Dispatchers. These are the employees who will ultimately decide and interact with the police officer who will respond to a specific call. If you were to survey Police Department operations in the Communications Bureau, you would witness the vast array of electronic data and programs which is at the disposal of the Police Department support staff.

I worked in the Communications Bureau 30 years ago when the unit was located here in Hauppauge, right next door to the Suffolk County Legislature. When I think of the equipment, and computers, and technology that people used back then, Communications Bureau was reminiscent of the old police television programs from the 1960s, and I'm dating myself here, such as Adam-12 or Dragnet. My point is this, we've come a long way in the technology department.

The third component of the Communications Bureau is the Teletype Unit. This section interacts with other police agencies throughout New York State, and also communicates with police agencies in all 50 states in the United States. Courtesy of INTERPOL in Washington D.C., Teletype can also interact with various international police departments around the globe. This unit, too, is a 24-hour operation, and the lion's share of their work must be completed in a time-is-of-the-essence fashion. For example, if a vehicle is stolen out of Suffolk County, an alarm is placed in our computer database, and if that same vehicle should be recovered in another state, that jurisdiction will reach out to us and seek an advisory as to the disposition of the vehicle. When they forward an e-mail to the Suffolk County Police Department, the Police Operations Aide on duty at the Teletype Unit has essentially a 15-minute time frame to respond to e-mail. The same policy would apply in other situations.

In a hypothetical situation, let's say a warrant is issued for the arrest of a John Q. Public for the charge of Robbery Third Degree. This warrant is electronically entered into the computer by the Police Operations Aides, and if another Police Department takes this individual into custody, that Police Department sends an e-mail to the Suffolk County Police Department and inquires as to extradition information. The Police Operations Aide then receives this e-mail -- that receives this e-mail, rather, has a 15-minute time frame to respond to the e-mail. These are just two examples of the types of alarms that POAs would be handling.

When I worked in this unit many years back, the total unit staffing stood at 15 employees. Five were assigned to each shift, five to midnight tour, five to eight-to-four tour, and five to four-to-twelve. Now, due to retirements, promotions and gradual staff reduction, there are five people which collectively comprise this unit.

Our County has grown, and with that, the demand for services has grown as well. It is exceedingly difficult to maintain optimal timely contact with other police jurisdictions if we do not have the

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

sufficient staffing to do the job.

During my tenure at the Police Department, I was involved in an independent entity known as the Civilian Awards Committee. Each year during Police Week in May, civilian employees from various divisions of the Police Department would be cited and honored for their outstanding achievements during the normal course of their duties. Each year the majority of the nominees and ultimately recipients of this award would be employees affiliated with the Police Emergency Unit. This is not to undermine the work or contributions of the other civilian employees of the Police Department, but, rather, it points out the extreme life-saving endeavors that these workers encounter and definitely deal with on a regular basis.

I will be having others briefly share their encounters as to what a typical workday would entail in the Unit. I want the Legislators to understand firsthand the life-and-death situations that these workers must face on a daily basis around the clock. In addition to the stress of the job, they must contend with mandated overtime situations. It has been brought to my attention, as you have already heard, that on a typical five-day work week, a unit employee may be facing mandated overtime during three of their five-day work weeks. The actual number could at peak times actually exceed what I have just stated to you.

We recently experienced a unique and exceptional weather phenomenon in the form of Hurricane Sandy. There were many components involved as we prepared, endured, and then lived with the after effects of that storm. But at the very core, at the heart line of this event, you had your committed Police Emergency workers doing the best job possible in the face of this natural disaster. They never skipped a beat and performed their job with the utmost of professionalism.

Aside from the staffing issue, there was also a problem with regards to the 852-COPS phone number, which has been publicly touted as an alternative resource point of contact for the general public. This number is to be strictly used for non-emergency situations. It has been brought to my attention that there was a staffing issue, per se, regarding this phone line. It is staffed by Communications Bureau personnel, Public Safety Dispatchers and Emergency Complaint Operators. So, in reality, it is not an entirely separate entity from the 911 function.

My purpose here today is this: I'm not here to criticize anyone, to institute a blame game, or to fault anyone with regard to this problem. I, along with my fellow County workers, are fully aware of the budgetary issues that the County faces in these dire fiscal times. I am respectfully requesting that, by whatever means possible, we build up the staffing in this unit. We are providing a vital service to the public, and for future large-scale emergency situations, and we know that they will occur, we need to be ready and armed with the appropriate staffing to handle the situation, whatever that may be.

I thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. At this juncture, I will introduce Suzanne McBride, a Public Safety Dispatcher I, and the Unit President for Police Emergency.

MS. MC BRIDE:

I want to thank you all for giving us this opportunity today to speak to you. I do have a PowerPoint presentation that I think will answer some of the questions that Mr. Kennedy was asking. Before I start that, however, I would like to answer that question.

You asked about men versus women. We have approximately 139 employees. Out of those 139, 27 of them are men.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay. And I'll be eager because I'm wanting to -- well, I need to know the function and the titles and the numbers of personnel in each one of those.

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

MS. MC BRIDE:

I do break that down.

LEG. KENNEDY:

I'm trying to struggle a little bit to hear that as well, but thank you. So it's a hundred and --

MS. MC BRIDE:

We have approximately 139, and 27 are men.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay.

MS. MC BRIDE:

And I did that math quickly, so --

LEG. KENNEDY:

Thank you.

MS. MC BRIDE:

-- I might be off by one or two, but I believe that's close to being accurate.

LEG. KENNEDY:

A hundred and thirty-nine total, 27 men. Thank you.

MS. MC BRIDE:

I have one other thing I'd like to mention before I get into my presentation. Legislator Kennedy, you also happened to mention about high incidents of breast cancer with night shift workers.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Yes.

MS. MC BRIDE:

There is one aspect I did not cover in my presentation. The County offers breast screening time, as well as --

LEG. KENNEDY:

Prostate.

MS. MC BRIDE:

Prostate, thank you, for men. My midnight personnel are not entitled to that time. We've been fighting for that time for several years. They are denied that time constantly. While my two-tour rotating people are entitled to that time, my midnight people are told they are not, they don't matter as much.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay. Well, Madam Chair, after this is done, we're going to get an opportunity to speak with Deputy Inspector Nieves, I assume.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Absolutely.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay.

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

CHAIRMAN BROWNING:

I would like her to go ahead with the presentation.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Sure. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

And then we'll continue questions afterwards.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Thank you.

MS. MC BRIDE:

We're just going to switch so I can do the PowerPoint. As we were discussing before, some of my members have already mentioned, the 911 Center has different job titles. We have 24 call-taking stations; they're set up into four pods of six work stations. For Dispatchers, we have eight stations, one for each of the seven precincts, and one additional to cover the Highway and Special Patrol functions. We have four backup dispatch stations that we activate in need of emergencies, such as hostage situations, pursuits, other major incidents, as well as parades. And if one of our main terminals goes down, we use those as backups. We consist of two floor supervisors, we have two duty office stations, and then we have the Teletype Office, which has two work stations for our teletype operators, the switchboard station and a supervisor station.

We have eight separate job titles. We have Public Safety Dispatch I, we have Public Safety Dispatch II, which is a Floor Supervisor, Public Safety Dispatch III, which is the Duty Office Supervisor, we have the Emergency Complaint Operators who take your calls, we have Spanish-Speaking Emergency Complaint Operators, which also take your calls, as well as those of our Spanish-speaking population. We have Police Operations Aides, who are teletype operators. We have a Senior Police Operation Aide, who is our Teletype Supervisor, and we have in budget a switchboard operator.

Our members work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. We work days, nights, weekends and holidays. We primarily work a five-day-on-two-day-off/five-day-on-three-day-off rotation. It's either rotating two-tour, meaning one week you work eight to four and the next week you work four to twelve, or steady midnight tour. Every two months our employees are required to work an extra day for free. That means we work six days on, two days off.

As you can see here, this is a chart of our budgeted versus actually filled positions. For the PSD function, we're budgeted for 68; we currently have 55 that are filled. We have four people out on extended leave. That means there's 17 positions that are not helping us meet minimum staffing. Our other drastic numbers are 58 ECO operators. Those are Emergency Complaint Operators. We budgeted for 58, we have 51. We have four more of those on extended leave, so we have 11 who aren't there to help us when we need them.

As you can see, our PO Operators, we're supposed to have nine, we have six. As Michael said earlier, there used to be 15 in the budget. They're still doing the same job, in fact, they do more.

Our PO Operators on the midnight tour have the responsibilities that are usually Detective's responsibilities during the day tour. We don't have a switchboard operator; we're budgeted for two, we have none. We have no Senior POA. There is no supervisor in the Teletype function, she retired and has never been replaced. And our supervisors, the PSD III, which replaced the Duty Officer, which was the Sergeants. There used to be at one point 13 of them. They budgeted for 11 PSD III's to replace them; we were only ever given nine. There was just not enough people to promote to fill those positions.

Public Safety Committee 11/29/12

Our PSD II's, they handle floor supervision, as well as tape search function for the DA's Office. If a case goes to court, they need to pull tapes to play in court. We're supposed to be budgeted for 12, we're down to eight. We used to have three that did tape search, we now have one. We used to have two that handled the administration function in the back office, such as budgeting, time sheets, things like that. We have none back there. As you can see, we're extremely low.

In order to fill one of these positions, it takes the County quite some time to get them actually filled and up and running where they're functioning as a full-fledged operator. You have to successfully pass a civil service test, which usually takes a year-plus to put out the announcement, give the test, get the results. They have to canvas to see who actually wants the job after all that time, then we have to do training. For Dispatcher, it takes six to twelve months to get an actual full-fledged Dispatcher who can be good at their job. For ECOs and POAs, it takes approximately two to four months. They have to learn a complex computer system, they have to go through customer service training, and they have to go through NYSPIN certification, which means they have to learn how to run data, warrant checks, missing persons, drivers license, vehicles, all of that information.

Our Dispatchers have to be able to handle 17 to 23 sector cars in each precinct, monitor numerous tracking systems, such as the ShotSpotter, which I'm sure you're all familiar with, as well as some other ones that I don't want to go into details on. They have to be able to coordinate with other agencies, and our call-takers and our Dispatchers have to be able to calm frantic callers. We have to be prepared for any emergency at any time.

Our responsibilities are to answer 911 calls, to answer 852 calls. We answer the general calls to the Police Department, there's a switchboard, because when we have no switchboard operator, it either goes to our POAs and Teletype or to our 911 Operators. We dispatch the emergency calls to sector cars, we monitor their status, keep them safe. We log all pertinent information for the police officers to use for their reports and possible prosecution of criminals. We provide a lifeline of safety to the officers on the road. We assist the officers on the road with wanted person checks, criminal history checks, missing person reports, stolen vehicle information and more. We also log the homeless sex offender locations on a daily basis.

There was a resolution put forth by the Legislators that all homeless sex offenders had to register with the Police Department their location every night. That duty has fallen to my supervisors, my PSD II's. The phone is at their desk and it's their responsibility to log every night. The phone rings continuously, taking them away from their duties of Supervisor of the Communications Section.

We have to coordinate with other agencies, such as the MTA, Nassau County Police, FBI, Homeland Security, FAA, State Police, and that's just to name a few. As I mentioned, we provide the tape recordings of 911 calls and Dispatch to use in court, and many other items. As I mentioned, our Dispatchers are a lifeline to police on the roads. It's not just our opinion, these items were taken from ABCO's website. That is the opinion of many officers; without us, they wouldn't be out there.

Michael had mentioned 852-COPS earlier. If you go on Suffolk County's Police website, it clearly states that 852-COPS is the Suffolk County Police Department's non-emergency telephone number to be used to report incidents requiring a police response. 852-COPS has become the non-emergency information line for Suffolk County. Any time anything's going on in the County, many of the news organizations are giving out 852-COPS as the number to call for information. We're not an information line. We've never been trained to give the information, we don't have the information. This is creating quite a hostile exchange between some of the citizens of this County and our operators. The citizens don't understand why they're being told, "Call 852-COPS for information." "Why don't you idiots have that information? I've been told to call you."

Public safety communication professionals have evolved over the years into a very skilled profession, but the recognition of this evolution has not kept. The ability of these professionals to adapt to the ever-changing situations and technology speaks volumes to the knowledge, skills and abilities